

THE
NATURE, DESIGN, AND GENERAL RULES
OF OUR
UNITED SOCIETIES.

Extracted from the Discipline of our Church.

(1) In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day), that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day, when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely on *Thursday*, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices, from time to time, which he judged most needful for them; and they always concluded their meetings with prayer, suited to their several necessities.

(2) This was the rise of the UNITED SOCIETY, first in Europe and then in America. Such a Society is no other than a “*company of men, having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their own salvation.*”

(3) That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a Class, one of whom is styled *The Leader*. It is his duty,

First, To see each person in his Class once a week, at least, in order,

1. To enquire how their souls prosper.
2. To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require.
3. To receive what they are willing to give towards the support of the Ministers, Preachers, Church, and Poor.

Second, To meet the Ministers and Stewards of the Society once a week, in order,

1. To inform the Ministers of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved.
2. To pay the Stewards what they have received of their several Classes in the week preceding.

(4) There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these Societies—a *desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins*. But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind. especially that which is most generally practised—such as,

The taking of the name of God in vain.

The profaning of the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein, or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness, *buying or selling spirituous liquors or drinking them*, unless in cases of extreme necessity.

Fighting, quarrelling, brawling, brother going to law

with brother ; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing, the using many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking things on usury, viz., unlawful interest.

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation ; particularly speaking evil of Magistrates or of Ministers.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as,

The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

The *taking such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.

Softness and needless self-indulgence.

Laying up treasure upon earth.

Borrowing without a probability of paying, or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

(5) It is expected of all who continue in these Societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity ; doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible to all men.

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.

To their souls, by instructing, *reproving*, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with ; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that " we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it."

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be ; employing them preferably to others ; buying one of another ; helping each

other in business; so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race that is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake.

(6) It is expected of all who desire to continue in these Societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly, By attending to all the ordinances of God; such are,

The public worship of God;

The ministry of the word, either read or expounded;

The Supper of the Lord;

Family and private prayer;

Searching the Scriptures; and

Fasting or abstinence.

(7) These are the general rules of our Societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But, then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

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